

Happy Endings in LGBTQ+ Fiction

Nicole Marcoux

Too often, LGBTQ+ characters in books, tv, and movies meet tragic ends. With few notable exceptions, the research on this topic is sparse, but the phenomenon is real and commonly noted by LGBTQ+ communities. GLAAD calls it “Bury Your Gays” (GLAAD, 2018). This unfortunate trope has also been known as “Dead Lesbian Syndrome.” The death of an LGBTQ+ character is usually at the expense of a cis, straight, normative character’s plotline. A character’s (non-hetero) sexuality or (non-cis) gender is often the reason for the character’s tragic end and/or the LGBTQ+ character becomes a stereotype of that role, with little depth or character-building beyond their queer or trans identity.

The need for LGBTQ+ young adult content with happy endings is crucial, particularly when the audience of that content is considered. Queer and trans youth are more likely to be bullied or harassed because of their sexuality or gender (Centre for Suicide Prevention, n.d.). Queer youth are 3-4 times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth, and trans youth nearly 6 times more likely (Global News, 2018). LGBTQ+ young people are also overrepresented in the populations of people experiencing homelessness (Centre for Suicide Prevention, n.d.). Increasing the number of happy endings and positive LGBTQ+ characters portrayed in books and media is not a cure to these gross statistics. However, given the increased likelihood of harassment and oppression, LGBTQ+ young people need to be affirmed that their identities are valid and celebratory. One way of promoting this message is through

an increase of LGBTQ+ characters and role models, story-lines, and conclusions that are positive, joyful, and not met with tragedy. Relying on the Bury Your Gays trope is not only harmful, it is also poor storytelling. The pervasiveness of this phenomenon is such that resorting to killing off queer or trans characters is no longer interesting; it is lazy.

Fortunately, growing media attention to this unnecessary trend has led to an increase in LGBTQ+ characters with positive endings and complex and interesting stories. According to a 2018 study, there are increasing numbers of stories with LGBTQ+ content and characters, and positive outcomes (Howard & Colborne, 2018). Within these increasing numbers, there also appears to be increasing representation within the LGBTQ+ umbrella. For example, Kann’s 2018 romance novel, *Let’s Talk About Love*, features a Black, asexual, queer main character, the first instance of these intersecting identities found from major publications. This novel is worth celebrating, both for its positive representation of Alice, the main character, and for its quality as a romance story. However, at the time of writing, Kann’s novel is the only YA novel featuring a Black, asexual, queer character. Hopefully as time goes on, the availability of novels with rich, positive, and representative characters such as Alice will increase significantly.

LGBTQ+ characters deserve to have complex lives, diverse interests, and rich stories. LGBTQ+ young adults deserve to see their lives and experiences reflected positively in those characters. Given the

already vulnerable circumstances some LGBTQ+ teens are in, they ought to be able to consume media that portrays a broad range of experiences, rather than seeing LGBTQ+ characters only as the sum of their tragedies.

Here are some suggestions of LGBTQ+ fiction with happy ends only! Beware that there are spoilers below.

***Ash.* Malinda Lo. 2009.**

In this queer reimaging of Cinderella, Ash is forced to live with her cruel stepmother and vain stepsisters after the death of her father. She escapes in a book of fairy tales that reminds her of her mother, eventually finding herself tied to the enchanting and mysterious fairy world. Ash is forced to choose between her strange attraction to sinister fairy, Sidhean who is cursed to love her, and Kaisa, the King's Huntress who shows Ash a life away from her stepmother. In the end, Ash is able to negotiate the curse with Sidhean and live the life she knows she wants, with Kaisa and the king's hunt. Ash's desire to be with Kaisa is never brought into question, nor is she persecuted for it. Kaisa's high status as the King's Huntress remains, and she openly loves and shows affection for Ash as the story progresses.

***Lies My Girlfriend Told Me.* Julie Ann Peters. 2014.**

Alix's girlfriend, the intoxicating Swanee, has died suddenly of cardiac failure. While going through her things, a devastated Alix discovers that Swanee has been leading a double life and dating someone else. This story deals with death and mourning, and certainly has its dark moments. The love that eventually grows between Alix and Liana is healthy and supportive, and they

work through their grief together and are able to process some of Swanee's unhealthy behaviours. Though this story opens with the death of a lesbian character, the hardship and tragedy of the characters in Peter's story are not because of their sexualities.

***When the Moon was Ours.* Anna Marie McLemore. 2016.**

Miel and Samir are best friends and magical beings. Trouble brews when the Bonner sisters start a plot to steal the roses that



grow out of Miel's wrist, to use in a love potion. McLemore weaves a rich tale of enchantment and explores the beauty of trans identities from multifaceted perspectives. The magical realism of this

story reads more like poetry at times and encourages the reader to stay open to any possibility (Lukoff, n.d.).

***It's Not Like It's a Secret.* Misa Sugiura. 2017**

Sana's life is about to get turned upside down. She and her family just moved to California, her dad might be having an affair, and she has never told anyone about the crush she had on her best friend back home. Everything changes when she meets Jamie, a smart and beautiful girl in Sana's new school. A story about love and friendship, Sugiura creates a multi-generational, cross-cultural story about queer teens navigating their feelings. In the



end, Sana and Jamie find happiness together, while accepting the differences between their friend groups and respecting their respective cultural family traditions.

***Let's Talk About Love.* Claire Kann. 2018.**

Alice is newly single and out as asexual to a few loved ones. When she least expects it, she finds a cute and dorky romance in a library coworker. Alice's asexuality is a

positive aspect of who she is. She has encouraging and supportive people in her life, such as her therapist and best friends and in the end she stays true to who she is. This book is above all else, a romance novel with a very cute friendship-to-romance arc. Though there are moments of hardship for Alice, her asexuality is never viewed as a problem to be fixed, and her happy ending includes her asexuality. This story is about love, friendship, and biological and chosen family.

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